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19 October 1962

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MEMORANDUM FOR FILE

1100 AM - 10-18-62 w/ The President, et al

Early in the morning of October 18th, Secretary McNamara called Mr. McCone at his residence expressing great concern over the reports from NPIC as a result of their examination of the two flights run on October 15th. Lundahl was at the house with the enlargements which indicated that, in addition to the three mobile MRBM sites detected on flight October 14th, there appeared to be now two IRBM sites with fixed launchers zeroed in on the Eastern United States. McNamara felt that this development demanded more prompt and decisive action.

The group which had been meeting on ^{Wed. 10/18} Tuesday met in the Cabinet Room at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday with the President. State tabled revisions in their papers on covering a limited one-time strike and blockade, most of which are dated 10/18 - 11:00 a.m.

At the opening of the meeting, McCone gave a brief resume of current intelligence and Lundahl presented the most recent photography. President questioned Lundahl further if the uninitiated could be persuaded that the photographs presented offensive MRBM missiles. Lundahl stated probably not and that we must have low-level photography for public consumption.

Secretary Rusk then stated that developments in the last 24 hours had substantially changed his thinking. He first questioned whether, if it is necessary to move against Cuba, and then concluded that it was because Cuba can become a formidable military threat. He also referred to the President's recent public statements and indicated a feeling that if no action was taken, we would free the Soviets to act any place they wished and at their own will. Also, Rusk stated the failure on our part to act would make our situation unmanageable elsewhere in the world. He furthermore indicated that this would be an indication of weakness which would have serious effect on our Allies. Secretary pointed out to the President that action would involve risks. We could expect counter action and the cost may be heavy. The President must expect action in Berlin, Korea and possibly against the United States itself. Rusk felt a quick strike would minimize the risk of counter action. He raised the question of solidarity of the Alliance and seemed to dismiss this question, feeling that the Alliance would hold together. Rusk stated that if we enter upon positive action, we can not say for sure what the final Soviet response will be and therefore what the final outcome will be. However he felt that the American people will accept danger and suffering if they are convinced doing so is necessary and that they have a clear conscience. The Secretary reviewed the circumstances surrounding the outbreak of World War I, World War II, and the Korean war. These factors militated in favor of consulting with Khrushchev

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and depending on the Rio pact. This, he indicated, might have the possibility of prevention of action and settlement by political means. The other course open was the declaration of war. Rusk expressed himself in favor of leaning upon the Rio pact, but does not dismiss the alternative of a unilateral declaration of war as the ultimate action we must take. The alternate is a quick strike.

Ambassador Bohlen was not present but his views were expressed in a message which was read in which he strongly advocated diplomatic effort and stated that military action prior to this would be wrong. He urged against action first and then decisive value of discussion. He also stated that limited quick military action was an illusion and that any military action would rapidly escalate into an invasion. McNamara at this point presented the alternatives referred to the previous day, stating that alternatives one and two were not conclusive and that we would have to resort to alternative 3 and in fact this would lead us ultimately into an invasion.

General Taylor generally reviewed the situation stating that the Chiefs looked upon Cuba as a forward base of serious proportions, that it cannot be taken out totally by air; that the military operation would be sizeable, nevertheless necessary.

Ambassador Thompson urged that any action be preceded by a declaration of war; he strongly advocated that we institute a blockade and not resort to military action unless and until it is determined that Castro and Khrushchev refuse to reverse their activities and actually remove the missiles which are now in place.

Secretary Dillon questioned what would be accomplished by talking to Khrushchev. He pointed out that we would probably become engaged in discussions from which we could not extract ourselves and therefore our freedom of action would be frustrated. Dillon was very positive that whatever action we take should be done without consultation with Khrushchev. Rusk seemed to disagree indicating there was a possibility that Khrushchev might be persuaded to reduce his efforts but he admitted also that he might step them up as a result of discussions.

President Kennedy was non-committal, however he seemed to continually raise questions of reactions of our allies, NATO, South America, public opinion and others. Raised the question whether we should not move the missiles out of Turkey. All readily agreed they were not much use but a political question was involved. Bundy thought this a good idea either under conditions of a strike or during a preliminary talk.

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McNamara discussed in some detail the effects of a strike indicating that we could expect several hundred Soviet citizens to be killed; he pointed out that all of the Sam sites were manned exclusively by Soviets and a great many Soviet technicians were working on the MRBMs and at the air fields. He agreed that we could move out of Turkey and Italy; pointed out the political complications. At this point McNamara seemed to be reconsidering his prior position of advocating military action and laid special emphasis on the fact that the price of Soviet retaliation, whether in Berlin or elsewhere, would be very high and we would not be able to control it.

Secretary Ball throughout the conversation maintained the position that strike without warning was not acceptable and that we should not proceed without discussion with Khrushchev. President Kennedy then said that he thought at some point Khrushchev would say that if we made a move against Cuba, he would take Berlin. McNamara surmised perhaps that was the price we must pay and perhaps we'd lose Berlin anyway. There followed an exchange of view on the possibility of the Soviets taking Berlin and our prospect of retaining it.

President Kennedy rather summed up the dilemma stating that action of a type contemplated would be opposed by the alliance - on the other hand, lack of action will create disunity, lack of confidence and disintegration of our several alliances and friendly relations with countries who have confidence in us.

As a result of discussions of the ("price" of a strike,) there followed a long discussion of the possibilities of a blockade, the advantages of it, and manner in which it would be carried out, etc. There seemed to be differences of opinion as to whether the blockade should be total, or should only involve military equipment which would mean blockading Soviet ships. Also there were continued references to blockading ships carrying offensive weapons and there seemed to be a differentiation in the minds of some in the policy of blockading offensive weapons as contrasted to blockading all weapons.

There followed discussion as to policies the President should follow with respect to calling Congress into session, asking for a declaration of war, advising the country and authorizing action. Thompson continued to insist that we must communicate with Khrushchev. There was a discussion concerning the President's meeting with Gromyko and the position he should take should the Cuban question come up. The President was advised to draw Gromyko out and it was indicated he probably would receive a flat denial that there were any offensive weapons in Cuba.

3 ~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

Meeting adjourned with the President requesting that we organize into two groups. One to study the advantages of what might be called a slow course of action which would involve a blockade to be followed by such further actions as appeared necessary as the situation evolved. Second would be referred to as a fast dynamic action which would involve the strike of substantial proportions with or without notice.

JOHN A. McCONE
Director

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4

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